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Summary of MAG Achievements in Iraq, March–May 2003

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Summary of MAG Achievements in Iraq, March–May 2003

This article highlights the demining efforts and accomplishments of the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) in Iraq.

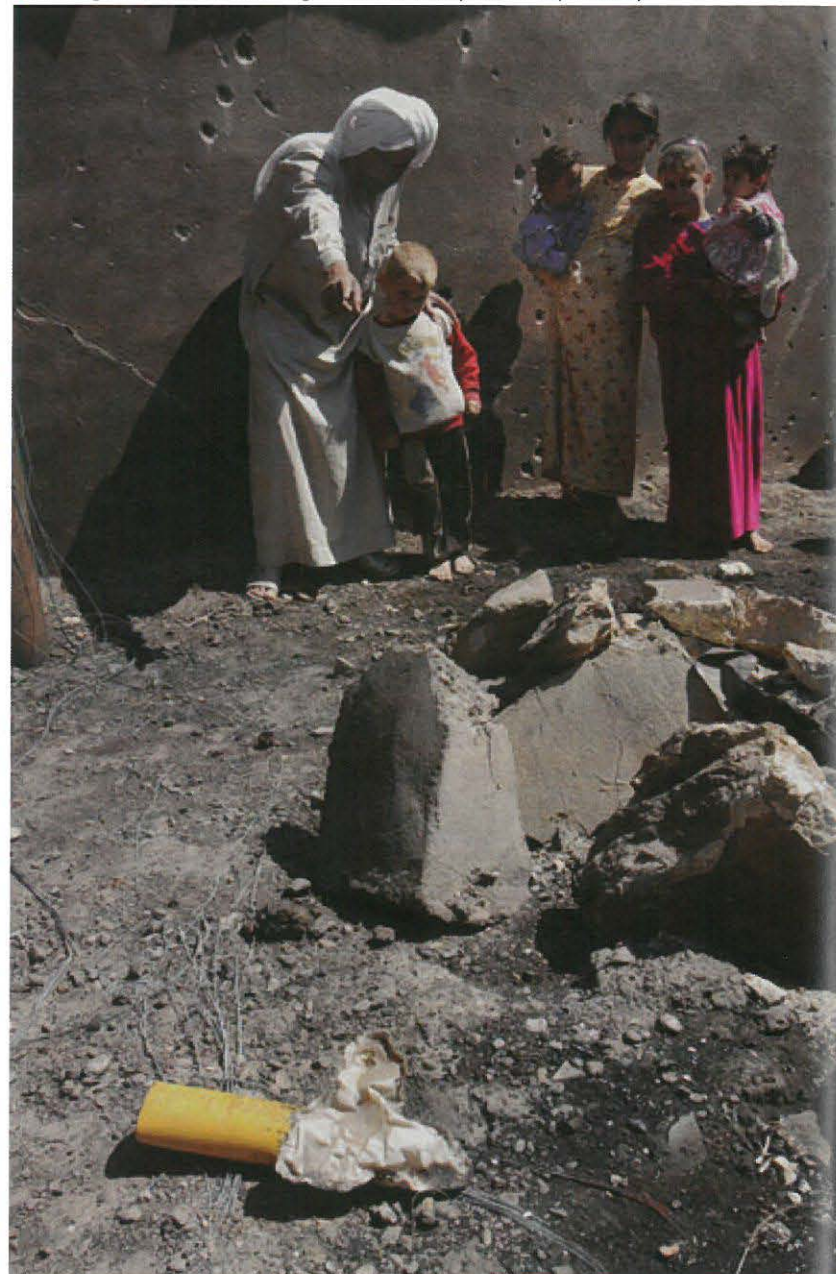
by Sean Sutton, MAG

MAG has worked in northern Iraq since 1993 and has a large and well-developed mine action programme conducting landmine clearance, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), survey, area demarcation and mine risk education (MRE) activities. This programme employed 700 Kurdish staff members who were supported by two expatriate advisors, fielding 17 Mine Action Teams and 14 Mine Risk Education Teams in the three northern governorates of Suleimaniyah/New Kirkuk, Dohuk and Erbil.

Prior to the beginning of the recent conflict, donors supported MAG's emergency preparedness activities in the region. This was primarily aimed at reducing the risk of injury or death to the hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees who began moving to remoter areas of northern Iraq in fear of the impending conflict. MAG focused its efforts on demarcating known dangerous areas where the thousands of displaced Kurds were expected to head. MAG also erected large billboards, distributed flyers and conducted MRE with travellers to pass on the key message: "stay on the road." Radio and TV messages were also broadcast, reaching an estimated 500,000 people.

MAG posted additional expatriate advisers to support the programme as it moved into an emergency configuration. MAG was operational before, during and after the recent conflict, with staff working seven days a week at the busiest time. MAG continued to conduct

Warning children about the dangers of UXO is every adult's responsibility.



Even with effective mine action campaigns, children will still be curious about UXO.

From the beginning of March up to the end of May, MAG achieved the following results:

Area cleared of mines and UXO	1,981,650 square metres
Mines destroyed/relocated for destruction	15,068 mines
Items of UXO destroyed/relocated for destruction	314,803 items
UXO removal tasks conducted	479 tasks
Minefields/mined areas cleared	8 minefields
Direct beneficiaries of above	473,223 people

Billboards erected	60 boards
Pamphlets printed/distributed	200,000 printed/40,000 distributed
Communities visited	138 local population visits
Schools, mosques etc visited	452
IDP locations visited	268 new IDP locations
Mine Awareness Workshops/ Training sessions held	28 sessions
Direct beneficiaries of above	122,979 people

MRE and emergency demining and EOD activities throughout the conflict and expanded its operations into former government of Iraq (GOI) areas as Kurdish and Coalition forces pushed south. While the conflict was ongoing, MAG started re-planning its work with the aim of reducing injury and death to Kurdish internally displaced persons (IDPs) who would soon start returning to areas around Kirkuk and Mosul. Due to the vast amount of abandoned

ammunition and UXO, and the presence of many unmarked minefields in these areas, MAG has now focused the majority of its capacity in former GOI areas around the cities of Kirkuk and Mosul, and along the former "green line," as security allowed access. With recently approved Department for International Development (DFID) funding, MAG is currently establishing a new mine action capacity in Mosul.

MAG also positioned staff in Kuwait prior to hostilities, enabling them to move quickly into southern Iraq to begin assessment activities as soon as the security situation allowed. MAG was able to immediately commence a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)-funded MRE project in southern Iraq, and will soon have an EOD and landmine clearance capacity in the south.

Security has not adversely affected

Iraq



■ A distraught mother comforts her son, who was injured while handling UXO.

operations in both the north and south of the country, while coordination with military and civil bodies has been strong and beneficial. MAG is still the only mineaction agency fully operational in former GOI-held areas of Iraq and will continue to increase its area of work into central Iraq as security allows. ■

**All graphics courtesy of Sean Sutton.*

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